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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 KINSHASA 000080

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

FROM BRAZZAVILLE EMBASSY OFFICE

PARIS FOR AFRICA WATCHER

DEPARTMENT FOR AF/C

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SUBJECT: CONGO/B: A LOOK AT THE NEW GOVERNMENT, REACTIONS TO CHANGE IN FINANCE MINISTER.

REF: 04 KINSHASA 02115

1. (U) POST HAS NO ACCESS TO CLASSIFIED SYSTEM AT THIS TIME, THEREFORE MORE DETAILED ANALYSIS WILL BE PROVIDED WHEN POSSIBLE.

2. (U) SUMMARY: IN A FOLLOW-UP TO CONGO/B PRESIDENT DENIS SASSOU NGUESSO'S NEW YEAR'S DAY SPEECH HIGHLIGHTING HIS DESIRE FOR A NEW, MORE EFFICIENT, EFFECTIVE, AND SMALLER GOVERNMENT TO ADVANCE FURTHER REFORMS, THE COUNTRY WAS SURPRISED ON JANUARY 8 WITH THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF A LARGER CABINET THAN BEFORE (35 VERSUS 34), WITH ONLY 5 NEW FACES. AT BEST THIS IS A RECONFIGURED CABINET, NOT A NEW ONE. MANY OF THE HARDLINERS, WHO CONGOLESE HAD EXPECTED TO BE REMOVED, REMAIN IN GOVERNMENT, BUT WITH EITHER BROADER POWERS OR RECONFIGURED PORTFOLIOS. THE BIGGEST SURPRISE WAS THAT THE COUNTRY'S VERY ABLE AND RESPECTED FINANCE MINISTER - BOTH IN CONGO AND AMONG THE IFIS - WAS NO LONGER IN THE GOVERNMENT. THE OTHER MAJOR CHANGE WAS THE CREATION OF A PRIME MINISTER POSITION WHEN THE LETTER OF THE CONSTITUTION DOES CITE SUCH A POSITION. THE ANTI-CORRUPTION MINISTRY WAS ALSO ELIMINATED, AND REPLACED BY AN AMORPHOUS "MINISTER OF STATE FOR THE PUBLIC SECTOR AND REFORM OF THE STATE." OUTSIDE OF THE NEW FINANCE MINISTER, PACIFIQUE ISSOBEKA, THE OTHER NEW FACE IN THE CABINET OF ANY IMPORT IS THE APPOINTMENT OF NATIONAL PETROLEUM DIRECTOR (SNPC) BRUNO ITOUA AS MINISTER IN A RECONFIGURED MINISTRY OF ENERGY AND HYDRO-POWER. (NB: PREVIOUSLY THE MINISTRY WAS CALLED MINES, ENERGY AND HYDRO-POWER.) DESPITE PUBLIC STATED DISAPPOINTMENT IN THE INDEPENDENT PRESS AND ON THE STREET, THERE IS NO OVERT EVIDENCE AT THIS TIME OF PLANS FOR PUBLIC DISORDER OR ANY OTHER REACTION BESIDES THE ISSUES PLAYING OUT IN THE INDEPENDENT PRESS AND PRIVATE CONVERSATIONS. END SUMMARY.

3. (U) AN ATMOSPHERE OF DISAPPOINTMENT PERSISTS IN THE CAPITAL, BUT THERE HAS BEEN NO MANIFESTATION OF THIS IN TERMS OF DEMONSTRATIONS OR OTHER PUBLIC DISORDER. IT IS VIEWED THAT PUBLIC DISORDER IS NOT LIKELY IN THE SHORT TERM GIVEN THAT MOST CONGOLESE STILL FEEL THE TRAUMAS OF THE 1997-2001 CONFLICTS. WHAT HAS HAPPENED IS THAT THE MEDIA BOTH BROADCAST AND PRINT HAVE COVERED EXTENSIVELY "MAN ON THE STREET" VIEWS, WHICH NOTE CONFUSION, DISAPPOINTMENT, AND CREDIBILITY ISSUES OF THE NEW TEAM. FOR MANY, INCLUDING THOSE IN THE DIPLOMATIC COMMUNITY, CONGO MIGHT HAVE MISSED A CHANCE TO BUILD ON 2004 REFORMS, AND FURTHER CHANGE ITS IMAGE IN THE NEAR TERM, PARTICULARLY AS REGARDS TO FURTHER TRANSPARENCY EFFORTS.

4. (U) THE NEW GOVERNMENT TOO HAS ALSO BEEN ON A MEDIA BLITZ, SEEKING TO EXPLAIN HOW IT IS AND WILL BE DIFFERENT, ADDRESSING QUESTIONS ABOUT THE CONSTITUTIONALITY OF THE PRIME MINISTER POST, AND HIGHLIGHTING THAT COMMITMENTS, PARTICULARLY TO THE IMF AND WORLD BANK WILL BE HONORED AND THAT THE IMF PROGRAM WILL REMAIN ON TRACK.

5. (SBU) THE NON-REAPPOINTMENT OF THE FINANCE AND THE NEW PRIME MINISTER POSITION ARE THE TWO BIG QUESTIONS BEING ADDRESSED BY THE PUBLIC AND DIPLOMATIC COMMUNITY. THE RUMOR ON THE STREET IS THAT IN THE UPCOMING MID-FEBRUARY CEMAC MEETING IN LIBREVILLE, PRESIDENT SASSOU WILL NOMINATE OUTGOING FINANCE MINISTER ANDLEY AS THE VICE GOVERNOR OF THE BANK OF CENTRAL AFRICA, THE POST HE HELD BEFORE BECOMING FINANCE MINISTER, AND THE POST WHICH THE NEW FINANCE MINISTER PACIFIQUE ISSOBEKA IS COMING FROM TO THE ROC. WE HEAR THIS IS TO DEMONSTRATE THE PRESIDENT'S APPRECIATION AND THANKS TO THE PUBLICLY WELL-LIKED FORMER FINANCE MINISTER FOR HIS STEWARDSHIP OF CONGO'S DEBT ISSUES AND HIS WORK WITH THE IMF AND WORLD BANK. ISSOBEKA, WE UNDERSTAND IS A SOLID TECHNICIAN, BUT IN CONGO THAT IS USUALLY NOT ENOUGH TO STEER OR HANDLE THE POLITICAL PRESSURES WHICH ARE SURE TO COME. WE WILL NEED TO WAIT AND SEE. HANDLING THE POLITICAL PRESSURE ON TRANSPARENCY ISSUES WAS BY FAR THE FORMER FINANCE MINISTER'S GREATEST STRENGTH, BUT ALSO ONE THAT GARNERED DISLIKE AMONG CERTAIN MORE HARDLINE MINISTERS.

6. (U) ON THE PM POST GOING TO FORMER GOVERNMENT COORDINATION AND TRANSPORT MINISTER ISIDORE MVOUBA, DISCUSSIONS CONTINUE WHETHER OR NOT ARTICLE 74 OF THE 2002

CONSTITUTION WHICH STATES THAT "THE PRESIDENT IS AUTHORIZED TO DELEGATE A FRACTION OF HIS POWERS FOR REASONS OF EFFICIENCY TO A MEMBER OF THE GOVERNMENT FOR CERTAIN DUTIES," COVERS THE CREATION OF THE PM POST. IT IS UNDER THIS ARTCILE THAT THE GOVERNMENT IS JUSTIFYING THE PM POSITION, AND IT IS THIS ARTICLE THAT THE INDEPENDENT PRINT PRESS AND PUBLIC ARE INTEPRETING DIFFERENTLY FROM THE GOVERNMENT. THE NEW MINISTER OF STATE FOR THE PRESIDENCY, FORMERLY THE PRESIDENT'S CHIEF OF STAFF, EMMAUEL YOKA, WHO IS ALSO THE PRESIDENT'S UNCLE, STATED IN A JAN 11 TELEVISION INTERVIEW THAT THE "SPIRIT OF ARTCILE 74 ALLOWS FOR THE CREATION OF A PRIME MINISTER." HENCE, THE DEBATES WILL CONTINUE, BUT THE POSTION WILL BE PART OF THIS RECONFIGURED CABINET.

17. (U) THE OTHER THREE NEW FACES IN THE CABINET ARE THE MINISTERS OF HEALTH, SECURITY, AND SMALL AND MEDIUM ENTERPRISES. CONVERSATIONS WITH INCOMING FINANCE MINISTER, OTHER MEMBERS OF GOVERNMENT, JOURNALISTS, AND OTHER CONTACTS AS WELL AS ANALYSIS WILL BE REPORTED SEPTEL WHEN POST HAS ACCESS TO CLASSIFIED SYSTEM. WE ALSO UNDERSTAND THAT A VISIT TO CONGO/B BY THE DEPUTY DIRECTOR OF THE IMF HAS BEEN POSTPONED BY THE IMF. THE NEW FINANCE MINISTER PLANS TO TRAVEL TO WASHINGTON AT THE END OF FEBRUARY.

18. (U) POST WILL FAX LIST OF RECONFIGURED CABINET LINE UP AND PHOTOS TO DEPARTMENT.

19. (U) BRAZZAVILLE EMBASSY OFFICE - SANDERS
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